

Testimony IN SUPPORT of House Bill No. 6578 - An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process; and IN SUPPORT of Senate Bill No. 1017- An Act Concerning Election Administration

March 10th, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Mae Flexer and Representative Dan Fox, Ranking Members Senator Rob Sampson and Representative Gale Mastrofrancesco, and honored members of the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee:

My name is Meg Wolfe, I am a current Graduate Student at the UConn School of Social Work and one of the student leaders of the UConn Hartford Voting Power Corps which aims to increase the voting power and civic knowledge of UConn Hartford Students and the surrounding communities. I am also a resident of Hartford's West End.

I support the passing of HB 6578 because it is extremely important to me that in Connecticut, we lessen barriers to voting and increase democratic participation. However, **while this bill codifies Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) at the Dept. of Motor Vehicles (DMV) I urge improvement to the bill expanding AVR to other state agencies.** Without such expansion we are still upholding certain barriers that restrict voter registration and participation.

Codifying AVR, as it is happening now at the Dept. of Motor Vehicles, into state law is a great first step which I applaud. **Expanding AVR to the Dept. of Social Services (DSS), HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges and universities and other state agencies** is a common-sense reform that will not only save taxpayer money but could lead to 245,000 new registered voters in CT According to the Center for American Progress. Furthermore, as a social work student I have witnessed the impact of including voter registration as part of intake processes at community centers and clinics. Having voter registration available at these centers allowed clients to easily register and understand voting laws that increased their democratic participation in elections. **Expanding AVR to other state agencies beyond the DMV would have a profound effect on CT citizens, especially those who are low-income or part of marginalized communities.**

In addition to increasing democratic participation, Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) **will enhance the security and integrity of our elections** by eliminating outdated addresses and duplicative registrations through an automatic process—**which will deliver the most accurate voter rolls to cities and towns. Eliminating duplicate registrations significantly reduces the workload for localities that could be susceptible to confusion on election day.** This past fall, I witnessed incredibly long lines at the polling location at Grace Lutheran Church in Hartford while holding a 'Celebrate the Vote' event where myself and other members of the UConn Hartford Voting Power Corps passed out snacks and hot beverages, played music, and provided

information about the polls to those waiting in line. At one point the line was over a two and a half hour wait and some voters had to leave the line and not cast their vote due to time restraints. **The reduced workload the AVR will lead to at localities will help to reduce the confusion and resulting long wait times - a must for protecting everyone's right to vote.**

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) is also incredibly popular, where 77% of Connecticut voters support AVR in a recent Secure Democracy public opinion poll. Nineteen states have versions of AVR and it is time to make Connecticut the next state to do so. Across the country, localities have **saved an average of about \$3.54 in labor costs per registration** by moving from a paper to an electronic method. That money saved could have a significant impact on future state budgets.

Lastly, passing SB 1017 is also absolutely necessary so that voters currently qualifying to vote absentee **retain the freedom they had in 2020 to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes.** These drop boxes made voting by absentee ballot quicker, easier, and safer than in previous years and increased voter participation where Connecticut saw a nearly 80% turnout in the 2020 election, largely due to the accessibility of secure ballot drop boxes.

I urge you to pass HB 6578 **but with expansion of Automatic Voter Registration beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles to other state agencies—and I urge you to pass SB 1017.**

Sincerely,
Meg Wolfe, she/her
Hartford, West End
megan.wolfe@uconn.edu